

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

DIVISION of PUBLIC HEALTH

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Dear Tourism Industry Provider:

With the height of the Alaska tourism season quickly approaching, I wanted to take this opportunity to address public health concerns related to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, or SARS. The Division of Public Health (DPH) is taking actions to reduce these concerns and ensure a positive, healthy experience for our tourists and for those of you in the tourism industry.

The recent cases of SARS worldwide have given rise to concerns for the health and safety of our citizens and visitors. Although Alaska has not had any reported cases of SARS to date, the disease has been detected in many countries, including the U.S., and the probability is high that we will eventually have a case in Alaska. However, the state is working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as Alaska hospitals and health care providers; to reduce the risk of exposure and infection within the state should SARS reach Alaska.

The CDC has issued guidelines to cruise ships for preparing, planning, and responding to suspected SARS patients. DPH has also been in contact with the cruise ship companies and the Alaska Marine Highway Transportation System to ensure their plans are appropriate for our communities and that there is coordination between the health care providers and the cruise ships in the event of a sick passenger arriving in one of our ports. We have also been in contact with the local emergency planning committees statewide, emergency medical services providers, emergency management agencies, and elected officials to keep them informed of the state's plans and preparedness activities.

Following is a fact sheet you may post in your place of business to describe to your employees and customers the facts about SARS and the proper simple precautions to take to reduce their risk of exposure to SARS and other infectious diseases. My staff and I are here to assist you and answer any questions you may have about public health and our plans and preparedness. Please call us if you have any concerns. I encourage you to become familiar with our SARS website (www.akepi.org), where we will post the most current information about SARS.

I wish you a safe and productive tourism season.

Sincerely,

Doug Bruce
Director